Christianity Part 2

Christianity

A debate:
Part II

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Victor:

Hi Ali,

I really appreciate your reply, in light of all the emails you must receive. I just want to respond to some things you wrote, then I will put the issue to rest, and simply just remember you in my prayers, my friend.

Ali Sina:

Paul saw the post-resurrected Jesus with his own eyes (Acts 9, Acts 26:12-18). That is the basis of his conviction about the resurrection. He had nothing to gain by fabricating such a lie. He lost everything, his high reputation amongst his own people, a comfortable life, suffered beatings and shipwrecks, poverty, the burden of leadership, and was eventually executed by the Roman emperor Nero for something He knew was a lie?

I did not say Paul was a liar. He indeed was a faithful believer and as you say he proved his sincerity with his sacrifices and martyrdom. However, his mystical experiences can be explained with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy syndrome. I have dedicated a long chapter of my book, Understanding Muhammad to this subject and I believe the evidence that TLE causes hallucinations of spiritual nature is well documented.

Victor:

Ali Sina:
<He actually was a persecutor of Christians. He had an epiphany, and as the result changed his position. He became a devout believer. He was not a rationalist. In fact he was against reason and preached foolishness. In 1 Cor. 1:20-25 he argues “the foolishness of God is wiser than (the wisdom of) men”.>

Why would a staunch persecutor of Christians suddenly change his mind about something he already had strong convictions against knowing he would lose everything he worked hard to gain his whole life if he did not have a very compelling reason (such as seeing the risen Christ himself) to do so? That is a miracle in itself that Saul of Tarsus became a devout believer!

Yes it is a miracle that now it can be explained in medical terms.

Victor:

That's not what Paul was arguing there, my friend. Paul was pointing out that God shames worldly wisdom by disallowing it as a means to knowing Him, but also by choosing to save the lowly, weak, and common nobodies. God is the demolisher of human pride. No saved sinner will be able to boast before Him that they achieved salvation by their own intellect. Your labeling Paul's teaching as foolishness is nothing new. Paul was aware that people would think this. He wrote, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)." God has nothing to prove by manufacturing a gospel that only the smartest people can embrace or understand. In fact He purposely confounds the wisdom of this world so as to humble prideful humanity. Paul was a highly learned scholar. In fact, while he gave his defense before the Roman governor Festus, the latter had to interrupt him with a loud voice saying, " Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad! (Acts 26:24)" Festus was astonished that a learned scholar like Paul could actually believe that the dead would live again--something no intelligent Roman would accept. Furthermore, Paul appealed to reason and facts when speaking with his hearers. The man is in chains and standing before a skeptic (King Agrippa) and he says in response to Festus, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner (Acts 26:25, 26)." The death of Jesus and the Christian's claim that He rose from the dead was common knowledge in Palestine and Christianity would have been easily crushed if such claims had no validity because many eye witnesses (believers and non-believers) were still alive to correct any false claims.

The problem is that I cannot accept a god that is not based on reason and appeals mostly to less educated people who are by nature gullible and easily fooled. Although the religionists

call this credulity, "purity of heart," I call it by its name.

I also do not reject the testimony of thousands of people claiming to have seen something extraordinary. The problem is that those thousands of people who allegedly saw the miracles of Jesus are not alive and the only source making that claim is a book written by his believers. I am not sure of the accuracy of that source. My logic dictates that if those thousands of people had seen all those miracles that are attributed to Jesus, they would not have demanded his crucifixion. Also if they had seen the resurrection, they would have surely become believers.

There are Islamic hadiths that say Muhammad split the moon, half of it could be seen from one side of the mountain and the other half from the other side. These traditions claim that everyone saw this miracle happening. Should I believe? Is there any other source beside the Quran and hadith that confirm this amazing story? Why such a phenomenon was not observed anywhere else in the world and why the Meccans refused to believe after seeing such a portent? I am sure no one saw any miracle. Nonetheless the narrator assures us that everyone saw it.

Victor:

Here's another example of Paul boldly appealing to reason, logic, and verifiable facts. He writes, " For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 Cor. 15:3-7)."

Paul here is claiming that 500 people witnessed the post resurrected Christ at once. We all know how powerful eye witness testimony is in our court system! Those do not sound like the words of a trickster who usually uses vague proofs that's hard to verify to trick the masses. Paul gives names of people who saw the risen Christ and mentions 500 witnesses. Like I said, he made it easy for any skeptic to crush Christianity, which they would have done if he was lying about any of these things. Remember, during Paul's time the faith was very young, weak, poor, and fragile, not the giant we see today. It would have been easy to crush by its many enemies (Romans and Jews) if it was based on lies.

Here Paul is not appealing to reason but to scriptures. Those 500 people he is mentioning are unnamed. Paul was in Rome and safe to say anything because no one could verify his claim. He probably believed it too because he was a believer and believers easily believe any claim that confirms their bias. What Paul said and what other believers said is not proof that these miracles actually happened. Do we have any other source beside the Bible confirming any of the claims of the Bible? Let us not commit the fallacy of circular reasoning.

Believers fabricate myths. They do it with utmost sincerity. They lie with clear conscience out of faith. The testimony of believers is not valid because their objectivity is questionable.

Bill Wiese, has written a book entitled *23 Minutes in Hell.* He claims God pulled him out of his bed in the middle of the night and took him to Hell so he can experience the agony and horror of that place and come and tell everyone that Hell is real and those who do not accept Jesus as their savior will go to Hell. (watch his interview on youtube: part 1, part 2, part 3).

Mr. Wiese claims that after suffering 23 agonizing minutes of tremendous fear and pain, and being tormented by monstrous and odious demons, God rescued him and told him that he just wanted him to experience Hell so he can warn others of it. Mr. Wiese, explains that he saw people falling into the pits of fire and he was allowed to feel the pain that God was feeling for them, which he could not bear.

Please spend a few minutes and watch those clips. This man sounds sincere, but is his story real? One question that passes the mind is if God is suffering so much for people going to Hell, why he sends them there? Why he made that terrible place and filled it with fearsome demons? Isn't he the architect of this world including the Hell? Isn't he the creator of demons? It just makes no sense that God would create a place so abominable as Hell for people who do not believe and then suffer for punishing them. This god must be insane. Imagine if I tell you that I love you very much and I want to be your friend, but you do not pay attention to me and then I take a gun to your head and say, because you refused my love and friendship I have no other choice but to kill you but I want you to know that I love you and I miss you and will cry for you. Wouldn't you think that I am insane?

It is pathetic that believers are so brain-dead that they cannot see that the god that they worship is insane. Such a god cannot possibly be the maker of this universe. However, once you agree to become foolish, you will gobble any gobbledygook and swallow any nonsense.

The truth is that either Mr. Wiese has had a hallucination or he is lying. Believers lie and they feel completely justified to do so. To them the end is so important that it justifies the means. Muslims often tell us that they were atheists, Jews or Christians and after seeing the miracles and the irrefutable proof of Islam, they were compelled to submit to Islam. However, they are unable to tell us what was this evidence that they saw. They just lie about their background, about their age, about their experiences, about everything.

My bet is that Mr. Wiese has had a hallucination. Most of the so called prophets were people like him. They were sincere and respectable members of their community, but believed in their own hallucinations and so did the ignorant people around them. It is simply foolish of God to communicate with humans in this way.

The whole notion of God sending people to hell for disbelief and then suffering for them is ludicrous. At least the god of Islam is consistent. He is vengeful, ruthless and diabolic, but in nowhere he pretends to love anyone. He wants to be loves and will burn those who don't love him. The God of Christians is just as ruthless as Allah but he is also a hypocrite and claims to love us and suffer for us when he tortures us. Isn't that pathetic?

Victor:

Ali Sina:
<Unlike Paul I am a man of reason. I cannot accept a God that is divorced from reason. Therefore what Paul says, to me sounds absurdity. In my humble opinion Paul has hijacked Christianity. The message of Jesus is much simpler and rational than what Paul regurgitated. >

Has your reason ever failed you, my friend? I mean, I happen to be a student at a university and I can tell you that my reason has failed me on many occasions when finals came along. The fact is that human reason is not perfect, but flawed. I love reason, don't get me wrong. But I learned that reason must be my ally, not my guide when it comes to spiritual matters because it has misled me on simpler matters many times. I just don't have as much confidence in my reasoning as you have in yours. I also don't have confidence in other people's reasoning, because I don't think their's is perfect either. God's reasoning is the only one that can be perfect and untainted by sin.

Yes my reason often fails me but this does not license me to be unreasonable. Despite being flawed, reason is the only vehicle that can take us to the truth. The good thing about reason is that it is always evolving. If the airplane cannot take you to the moon it does not mean you abandon it in midair and do without it. You land safely and work to build a better spaceship. You still work within the framework of physics.

The problem with abandoning reason is that you expose yourself to absurdities. Who can guarantee that the irrational belief that you embrace leads you to God? There are thousands of faiths. All of them are firmly believed and all of them are irrational. Which one should I choose? Why should I accept one irrational faith over another? What if I make a mistake? Let us say I follow the irrational god of the Christians and when I die I find out that I should have believed in Allah. Then Allah will send me to his cosmic rotisserie, which is a terrible place. But if I choose to believe in Allah and it happens that Allah is Satan, them the god of Christians will send me to Hell. How can I know which damned god is the right one? Following one's heart is not a wise thing to do. The Muslim suicide bombers also follow their hearts. I do not think a wise God would leave people on their own when it comes to such an important thing. Therefore, if something is not reasonable, it is certain that it is not from God, unless you admit that God is foolish, in which case I do not want to worship him.

Victor:

I've heard the argument that Christianity was hijacked by Paul before but I've not seen substantial evidence to conclude on the accuracy of such a statement. Jesus is called the chief cornerstone (Isaiah 28:16, Jer. 51:26, Zec. 10:4, Eph 2:20, 1 Peter 2: 6). The foundation is laid by the Apostles and Prophets (true prophets unlike Muhammad). Lastly, Paul couldn't hijack Christianity because the twelve disciples of Christ were the leaders of the movement and did not disagree with Paul's teachings. They were the ones who walked with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry to the final moment he ascended into heaven. They witnessed his life, his miracles, and knew all his teachings. Surely, if Paul was teaching anything different from their beloved Master they would have been the first to correct him and condemn his false teachings. But that's not what happened. In fact, we see the opposite.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, who were questioning his authority, saying "For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter, and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do (Galatians 2:9)."

You could say it was a form of peer review, but Paul definitely had to have the approval of those who were closest to Jesus during his earthly ministry, in order for his teaching to be accepted by the early church.

We do not hear much of the other apostles after the death of Jesus. It seems that only a few remained active. Paul was more learned than the apostles and he must have impressed them with, not only his erudition, but also with his devotion and sacrifices. He was the one on fire. Paul was not preaching anything against Christianity for the apostles to object. He went overboard and when you are a believer you do not oppose those who exceed in faith, you admire them. Why do you think the Islamic extremists, although the minority, are not opposed by the majority of Muslims? They are eulogized and deemed as heroes.

Victor:

Ali Sina:
<If you mean bodily resurrection, my answer is no. This is contrary to science and logic. Where would the body of Jesus go? Also I do not see any reason to call Jesus a liar or a lunatic just because his followers exaggerated. It were they who lied not Jesus. Christ's teachings are beautiful. There is no need to believe in resurrection to see what he taught is good. The story of resurrection is a fable concocted by his zealot followers who may have lied to attribute miracles to their messiah. There are also several miracles attributed to Muhammad. Do I have to believe in them? Believers love to lie to promote their faith and lionize their guru.>

That's fair enough. Who said science and logic was king? I love science and logic like I said before. But I do not think facts should be dismissed just because they happen to exceed the boundaries of our finite logic and limited science.

I never said facts should be dismissed just because they happen to exceed the boundaries of our finite logic and limited science. If you read my latest three articles (1, 2, 3) you'll see that I am daring everyone to look beyond and never let the authority of even Einstein intimidate them. All scientific theories can and must be defied. We must never sink into complacency and believe that we have learned everything that has to be learned. However, this does not mean we should abandon reason and embrace any claim uncritically. The claim that God sends us to hell for disbelief and then suffers for us is outright stupid. God cannot both love us and send us to hell if we don't love him. This shows that his love for us in not real. He only loves himself. He only rewards those who stroke his ego and punishes those who ignore him. This god suffers from narcissistic personality disorder and is severely psychotic.

Victor:

Is it possible that the resurrection happened because God chose to overcome His own natural laws in order to confirm the ministry of Christ and who He claimed to be? How do we know a person really is sent from God unless they accomplish the impossible? That's the whole point. The true Messiah is supposed to defy science and logic. If Jesus came and did magic tricks, that's not impressive at all. David Blaine or Houdini can do that too.

No, a real God would not break his own natural laws to impress us. He would not play tricks to fool us. That is not godly. As you said any magician can perform tricks that look extraordinary. God has to use reason to convince us. Furthermore, even if the miracles happened they were proof for those who saw them, not for us. All we have is a book written by a believer. Now we are left to rely on the account of a believer. I don't think that is a wise

thing to do. Believers are not trustworthy witnesses in any religion. They tend to fool even themselves.

> **Victor:**
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> But if someone says they're the Son of God, which Jesus did (John 8), that person has to prove it by doing what only God can do. That person has to defeat humanity's greatest enemy. That person will have to defy death by rising from the dead. This is how God promised to mark the true Messiah so that we can recognize Him when He comes.

I don't think Jesus lied when he said he was the Son of God. He was talking about his soul being begotten of God. You and I are also children of God. When speaking of his physical reality Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man (Mark 2:10).

> **Victor:**
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> Amongst many other signs, His resurrection will be the ultimate sign. He will die and then rise and ascend into heaven to sit by the right hand of God.

Where is the proof of resurrection? Why should we trust the accounts of believers? The gospels were written decades after Christ. We cannot be sure of the accuracy of their source since the authors were not eyewitnesses themselves. The same is true about the Quran. This Quran that is in use was compiled by the third Caliph at least three decades after the death of Muhammad. He then ordered all other versions to be burnt so there could be no discrepancies.

> **Victor:**
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> Like I pointed to earlier, if the story of the resurrection was a fable, as you say it is, some Jews during that time, who were eager and powerful enough to crush it, would have succeeded in doing so. But when you look at the rabbinical writings of those times, their silence on this matter, which even Josephus was not ashamed to say a word or two about, speaks volumes about the truth of the gospel accounts, which says that Christ did indeed rise from the grave.

No power can make a myth die by force. In fact the more you persecute the believers, the stronger becomes their conviction.

When we were kids we used to play a trick. We would go to someone and say, do you know that ancient Persians had discovered wireless communication. The other person would ask how so? Then we would say, because the archeologists have dug everywhere and they have found no trace of wires. Your reasoning is very much like that. The fact that there is no mention of Jesus in rabbinical writings is because Jesus did not do any of these miracles attributed to him and he did not impress but a few humble and insignificant people. As far as

the rabbis were concerned, Jesus was not important enough to write about. Think about it, a person as ordinary as me has at least four Islamic sites (faithfreedom.com, answering-faithfreedom.org, examinethetruth.com, faithfreedom.myforumportal.com) dedicated to refute him, and you expect us to believe that rabbis sow this many amazing miracles from Jesus and did not write even a word trying to refute him? I am sorry, this is not how we humans work. If Jesus did all those things claimed by the Christians, many would have believed in him and many would have written against him too.

It is clear that all these miracles were attributed to Jesus afterwards, just as they were attributed to Muhammad and every other person who claimed to be a prophet. Even Jim Jones was claimed to have made miracles, like multiplying KFC chickens and his followers were so brainwashed that took part in that scam to fool the newcomers. Belief makes you do strange things. When you become capable of murdering and sacrificing your own life for your belief, what is a little lie to help God?

Victor:

Like I said, just because Muhammad's miracles were lies doesn't mean that Christ's miracles were lies also. Christ did miracles that were verifiable by the people of his time. They were done in the open. Yes, there are those who lie to lionize their gurus but one must not over generalize. There are many impostors and Jesus warned that many false Christs will come after his departure, and I am convinced Muhammad was one of those impostors, as well as this John De Ruiter guy you mentioned in your article "Which Religion is Good". As you mention, many of this guy's followers are college graduates and middle class who should know better. But they don't because deception does not discriminate. It snares both the wise and foolish, the logician and the simple minded, the rich and the poor. The only defense against its power is "truth." Jesus said, "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he, ' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them." If people would heed these words of Christ they would not be following these self proclaimed prophets and lunatics because they'll guard themselves with the truth.

You keep talking about miracles, but all you can produce as evidence is a book written by believers. I am afraid that book is not proof. I do not trust the testimony of the believers of any religion. They are not objective and their testimony should not be taken seriously.

I do not need miracles to believe that Jesus was a superior man. His teachings tell me that. If I want entertainment, I watch Criss Angel, but for enlightenment I listen to Christ Jesus.

Victor:

Ali Sina:
I don’t know whether I will stand in front of my creator or not. If I stand I will condemn him and point out to his sins, cruelties and criminal negligence before he can condemn me. I am far less sinner than God. All my sins were caused by ignorance. I never committed sin out of malice. God cannot have the same excuse. Unlike me, he can’t plead ignorance. Therefore he must answer for all the injustices that humanity has suffered since the beginning of time. Convince God to debate with me and I will defeat him like I have defeated all my other opponents. In the Day of Judgment, I am not afraid to stand in front of God. I have done nothing evil to fear. It is God that must fear standing in front of me. I may not be able to send him to hell, but I can put him to shame.

I beg to differ, my friend.

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things (Romans 2:1,2)"

"...Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar... (Romans 3:4)"

" Now we know that whatever the law (God's law) says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Have you ever lied? Then you've broken the 9th commandment and you're a liar.

Have you ever stolen? Then you've broken the 8th commandment and you're a thief.

Have you ever looked with lust? Then you've broken the 7th commandment and you're an adulterer at heart. Jesus said, "If a man looks at a woman with lust, he has committed adultery with that woman already (Matthew 5:27).

Have you ever hated anyone? Then you have committed murder and broken the 6th commandment (1 John 3:15).

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1John 1:8)."

The problem with the “word of God” is that it is a fallacy. The word of God is never the word of God, but the word of men who claim to speak on behalf of God, with no evidence. I trust more the word of reason, because I can understand it, challenge it and contribute to it. Much evil has been done in the name of God. If God has something to say, let him say it to our face, because I have difficulty distinguishing false prophets from true ones when all of them speak absurdities and demand blind faith. Some religious teachings are better than others,

but it is again up to me to separate the wheat from the chaff, using my own reason. If I can do that, why do I need to follow anyone? I already know truthfulness is good and lies are bad; kindness is better than cruelty, and fairness is superior to injustice. I do not need someone telling me what is self evident. The problem with following another person blindly is that this person can instruct me to do evil and since I have surrendered my own rational faculty to him, I may do it. If I have to abandon reason then I am very vulnerable and can fall prey to any charlatan.

> **Victor:**
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> Finally, it is not God who will be answering to you, but the reverse. You will not stand before God, you will kneel before Him, like all creation does by His mere greatness. You will not even be able to open your mouth before this powerful God who created millions of galaxies with their trillions of stars with the mere command of His words. He has promised to judge all people and right all the wrongs that have been done under the sun on the day He has appointed. He does no need to answer to anyone.

Are you saying that God is a narcissist despot like Saddam Hussein and Hitler? Are you saying in the divine court might is right and the law of jungle prevails over reason? In that case god has the upper hand over me, but this does not make him right. It defies logic that God give us brain and then punish us for using it.

> **Victor:**
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> If you doubt He is loving, just look at the mere fact that He did not crush you for writing such lofty words and you will see, my friend, that he does indeed love His own enemies just like He tells His followers to do.

Could it also be interpreted that the God of which you talk about does not exist? The way you described God, he does not seem to be a loving God. You described a narcissist, an irrational deity that does not understand reason, acts wantonly and does as he pleases. This is how a bully would act. Such a god is unworthy of praise.

> **Victor:**
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> One last thing;
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> To be on a real journey for truth, you have to at least realize that there is truth. You have to also understand that the world religions and philosophies are contradictory to one another, therefore, they can't all be true. Only one of them can be true, logically, or all of them can be false. But all of them can't be true.

Everyone is wrong in some points and right in other. No one is absolutely right, because that requires perfection. *Errare humanum est.* All colors contain some white and some black in

different degrees. There is no such thing as absolute black or absolute white.

> **Victor:**
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> Logically, you have two options: 1) One of the religions is true and the rest are false or 2) none of them are true and the truth is something else, maybe not yet revealed to humanity, or outside our scope of discovery.
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> You might go with option # 2. But then I pose this question to you;
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> Why would a loving God create human beings who are worshipers by nature and religious by nature, only to not reveal Himself to them and leave them in a state of utter lostness?
>
> Why would a God who created humans to be relational beings not reveal Himself to them so they can know who He is?

This is called *petitio principi.* In this logical fallacy the premise is as questionable as the conclusion. You have to yet prove the existence of God and the claim that he is a loving god. Until then this question is moot.

As an ex-worshiper, I can assure you that worshiping is a habit and not part of human nature. I feel no urge to worship anyone or anything since I gave up the beleif in a personal god.

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> **Victor:**
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> This is one of the longest emails I have written ever and I hope you have time to read it. I appreciate it.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Victor

Welcome to the city of garrulousness. In this town I am the mayor.

Please comment here: